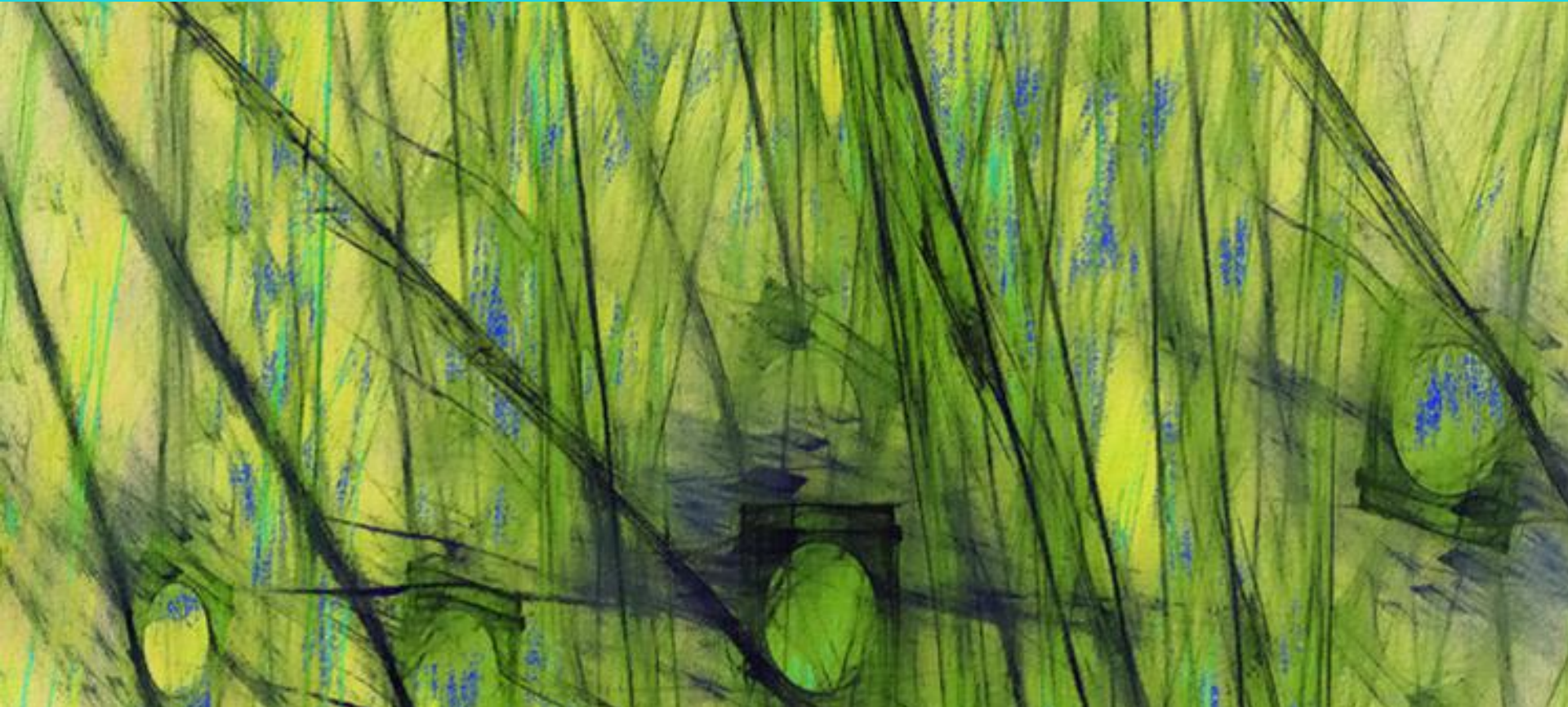


Consensus Building to Resolve Conflicts



Patricia Johnston (BLM)
Helene Aarons (Helene Aarons Consulting)
July, 2012



What Is Consensus Building?

- A process used to resolve a conflict involving many diverse parties in which the input and ideas of all the participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final position acceptable to all
- Also called collaborative problem-solving or collaboration



What Is Collaboration?

- Collaboration is an open and inclusive process, a tool to engage a broad array of diverse entities to come together to find solutions for issues/problems



What Is Conflict Resolution?

- A wide range of processes used to address sources of conflict which produce agreements and resolutions
- Processes involved in conflict resolution generally include facilitation, consensus building, negotiation, mediation, and joint-fact finding
- Within the federal agencies conflict resolution is known as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)




What Is Facilitation?

- A process in which a third-party neutral assists a group in decision-making or problem solving by helping increase the group's effectiveness
- The goal is not necessarily to resolve conflict, but rather to guide the group in its thinking process, keep the group focused, and help participants communicate effectively with one another and as a group



The Facilitator Should:

- Develop a safe environment for all participants
- Develop a respectful listening environment
- Support all participants
- Be acceptable to all participants
- Not be vested in an outcome
- Remain neutral throughout the process



“The cornerstone to building consensus is listening with respect to others and allowing the speaker to express themselves in a forthright manner.”

- Bob Chadwick
Consensus Associates



What Is the Facilitators' Role?

The facilitator of a consensus building effort moves through a series of steps:

- Participant identification and recruitment
- Design of the process to be used
- Problem definition and analysis
- Identification and evaluation of alternative solutions
- Decision-making
- Finalization and approval of the decision
- Implementation

Consensus Building Tools

1. The Grounding
2. The Greeting Circle
3. Roles of facilitator and recorder
4. Best / Worst Outcomes
5. Closure
6. A process for coping with conflict
7. Collective Statements



The Grounding

- Define conflict
- How do you feel about it?
- What are the unresolved conflicts that confront you in your life?



Worst Possible Outcome Exercise

- What are the worst possible outcomes of confronting this unresolved conflict?



Best Possible Outcome Exercise

- Use the same conflict situation to list the best possible outcomes of confronting and resolving this conflict



Closure Exercise

- What did you learn from these exercises that will help you confront and resolve your conflicts?
- How did you feel about these activities?



Using your Best Outcomes-Collective Statements

Collective statements are not consensus statements. They represent the views of all the participants, but not all participants would agree with all the assertions in the statements. These can be, and many will be, developed into consensus statements.



Using your Best Outcomes-Collective Statements

The collective statement is a compilation of the best outcome statements. The collective statement is made in the present tense as an "active" way to frame future actions. Such statements can guide a group to consensus.

Collective Statement Element - Sample

Trust grows. . .

Deepening of relationships and trust building continues into the future. Mutual respect blossoms. Stronger bonds between partnerships are made. Safety and support for small as well as large partners. Doubters become believers and suggest the next partnership because all needs and more are met for all partners. The success serves as a model for new partnerships.



Resources

For a description of the Consensus Institute workshop process:

managingwholes.com

For information on the role of the facilitator in the consensus building process:

www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/consens.html